

## Modern Trail Bosses Have Same Old Irritations, Plus Electronic Whips

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — Awhile back, when the news began to circulate about the big steer drive the Texas Longhorn Breeders Assn. was making from San Antonio to the old cowport, Dodge City, I was a bit peeved that the route was going to miss the Shortgrass Country.

We needed the excitement. Our May political contest had moved to the higher courts. Nobody was burning any prickly pear, so there were no reports of cremating any big rattlesnakes. About all the distraction this part of the rangeland had to offer was the ancient July pastime of worrying whether the needlegrass and heat are going to turn the late lambs into 45-pound eyesores.

Therefore it seemed at the time that the shortgrass area was in bad need of something similar to this mainly motorized move-'em-north expedition to dispel the doldrums which encompassed every facet of our existence.

The sting of being ignored didn't last long, however. The agony of being left out of this western scene ended when it was revealed that the philosophy of the modern blacktop trail bosses wasn't going to be any different from that of other bosses since the beginning of time. That is, when the press released information that the jefes were using walkie-talkies to handle the mammoth man-herding portion of the event (on-the-scene estimates guess that there were 12 or 15 drovers for every steer), it was obvious that the men with no rank were going to suffer.

Furthermore, when the same reports explained that the portable telephones were being brought into the act to save horseflesh instead of conserving the saddle-pounding on the drovers' posteriors, it was a dead cinch that the lower-echelon cow worriers would have been better off staying at home.

Granted, there've been plenty of instances in the history of the range country when it would have been handy to have a few thousand decibels of high-fidelity sound to transmit into the ears of a couple of waddies who were verbally re-riding wild horses instead of driving cattle.

And there's no denying that in the days when the country was a vast, open rangeland, there were occasions when it was advisable to save the mileage on a horse's speedometer.

But to project these ancient necessities into this era of foam-cushioned pickups, plus adding blasts of transistorized sound to upset the already temperamental jet-age cowboy, is as outdated as a man who thinks every long-haired teenager is bound to be a girl.

In fact, when you take into consideration how much stress these roadside trail hands suffered, toiling in the saddle for as long as two miles at a stretch, it's a wonder the upperhanded techniques of the chiefs hadn't been the straw that turned the entire operation into a mutiny.

So after hearing what mankillers these trail bosses were, there was no reason to want the tragedy passing across this land that has seen so many examples of the same type of coldheartedness. We needed diversion, but not at the price of watching men being abused by their masters.

Besides, as anyone knows who has ever so much as passed through the Shortgrass Country, we generally need 93 head more cattle and 1200-1500 head of drovers trampling down our right-of ways about as bad as the auto junk dealers need the Senate's Wives club to become interested in Mrs. Johnson's highway beautification plans.